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November 22, 2004

The Honorable Norman Y. Mineta  
Secretary of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
400 Seventh Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Mineta:

We are writing in regards to the Department of Transportation's (DOT) review of proposals by carriers interested in providing small community air service to Dickinson, North Dakota. As you know, this service is currently provided by Great Lakes Aviation, Ltd. (Great Lakes) to both Williston and Dickinson, North Dakota, in the form of two round-trip flights a day.

We are extremely appreciative of the support DOT has provided for air service to small, rural communities all across the country. The quality of air service is especially critical to the economic well-being of rural communities, and the Essential Air Service Program (EAS) enables these communities to maintain a link to the national air travel infrastructure.

As you know, we have and will continue to be, among the strongest proponents in Congress for EAS. We believe that it is crucial for Congress to maintain funding for this vital program and we pledge to work towards that end.

Two years ago, DOT increased the EAS funding for Great Lakes' Dickinson service to enable the carrier to increase the size of the planes used for the two round-trip flights to thirty seat planes. We believe that DOT has seen an excellent return on its investment, this improvement has resulted in greater customer satisfaction and increased ridership on these flights.

During the current review of proposals, DOT once again has the opportunity to greatly contribute to improving air service to the Williston/Dickinson communities. As the result of a Small Community Air Service Development grant received by Dickinson in September 2003, Great Lakes was able to increase the flights provided to Dickinson/Williston to three daily round-trip flights for a period of several months. During that time period, the additional flight was extremely well received, bringing additional enplanements during each month that the added flight was offered.

Because of the success of that effort, Great Lakes has submitted among its proposals for the next two year contract period options for both year round service with three flights, and seasonal service with three flights. We believe that funding for three round-trip flights year round would be of maximum benefit to the economies and citizens of Dickinson and Williston. However, like these communities, we recognize that DOT is faced with limited funds and that for a smaller bid amount the seasonal three flight option would also be of great benefit to the communities.

Great Lakes and the communities have shown great diligence and effort in assessing the seasonal three flight proposal, and have demonstrated the merits and need for its selection. For that reason, we urge you to support their selection of Great Lakes proposal #4 for three flights daily round-trip excepting the period between January and April.

In its decision, DOT should consider several important points. First, while Williston is not currently an EAS community, it certainly would qualify for such funding, but instead has worked with Great Lakes and the Dickinson community to combine their air service. Thus the subsidy amount for Dickinson is actually serving two communities, and for a longer route than any other EAS community in the country.

In addition, the request for increased funding to provide a third flight is justified by the increased passenger traffic that this third flight will generate. DOT has the added advantage in this instance of being able to assess the Great Lakes proposal by examining how the service has fared. Because of last year's Small Community Air Service Development grant, Great Lakes, Dickinson and Williston have been able to lay the foundation for the success of the third flight, thus increasing efficiencies and minimizing the increase in cost for DOT to adopt the third flight going forward.

For these reasons, we add our voices to the strong support that you have already received from the communities of Williston and Dickinson, North Dakota, for Great Lakes' proposal #4 to provide three seasonal round-trip flights.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge your favorable review.

Sincerely,



Byron L. Dorgan  
U.S. Senator



Kent Conrad  
U.S. Senator



Earl Pomeroy  
U.S. Representative

Cc: Karan K. Bhatia, Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs